

March 16, 2000

(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)

Ladies and gentlemen, Ambassador Seiple and honorable Commissioners and guests, I am privileged to be here to speak about the true situation of China's churches especially the persecuted house churches. Let me give you a brief introduction about my family and myself.

I was born in a peasant family in Shandong province in northern China. After activity during college in support of the 1989 pro-democracy movement, I read powerful Christian biography and became a follower of Christ. Though I was teaching English in the Beijing Party School of CCP, which is a job with light work, I spent most of my time in doing house church ministries. In 1995, in order to help the rapid need of Bible teachers, several of my co-workers in Beijing, my wife and I founded an official Bible school outside Beijing to train younger house church leaders whom we recruited from several major house church groups. This led to our detention by Public Security Bureau of Beijing in the name of "illegal evangelizing" in May 1996. In those two months of imprisonment we were treated as hardened criminals and almost all of our properties even our wedding video were confiscated without a receipt; under house arrest after our release we managed to flee and reach Hong Kong in September. There, waiting for almost 9 months, after intervention by the U.S. Christian Chinese community, evangelical leaders, congressional leaders and US government, my wife and I with son Daniel, left Hong Kong June 27, just before its return to China. Now we are residing at Philadelphia where I am studying theology at Westminster Seminary. We had been receiving updated information on the situation of house churches through various channels such as faxes, phone calls and handwritten letters brought by visitors to China from other countries.

The whole history of China's house church movement is a history of persecution by Chinese Communist government.

In May of 1950 the Chinese Communist Party created a "patriotic organization";

among the Protestants. This organization was formally organized as the "Chinese Protestant Anti-America and Aid-Korea Three-self Reformed Movement" in April of 1951. At the initial stage of its organization, the "three-self movement" published a "Christian Manifesto" on July 28, 1950 which stated that In the past Christianity was used by Western imperialists to conduct aggression in China and that if Christianity is to have any future in China, it must cut off its relations with foreign missions and to declare its support for the new regime. All Christian leaders were asked to sign this document to declare their support for the new government. Those who failed doing so led to severe punishment from execution to life sentence as counter-revolutionaries.

By 1958 the visible institutional church established by foreign missions over 107 years (1842-1949) were practically destroyed by the Chinese Communist Party through the agency of the Three-self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). Missionaries were driven out by January of 1951. Most Christian publishing houses, Christian schools, colleges and seminaries and church boards were dissolved during 1952 to 1954. Most church buildings were taken over by the state.

With this kind of situation the Christian community was confronted with a new challenge: how to carry on church life and ministry without church organizations, without pastoral leadership, and without church buildings? Furthermore, it was dangerous to meet privately at home, as the TSPM had announced that all home meetings are illegal and their leaders subject arrest by the state.

Under such crucial circumstances, lay leader rose up to lead home meetings at great personal risk. This was the beginning of the house church movement in contemporary China. During Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), practically all Christians suffered. God was at work among his people. God called a few faithful men to serve as itinerant evangelist; Brother Li by name began to itinerize in his hometown in Henan after his release from ten years of imprisonment in 1970 before he was arrested again in 1974. Brother Peter Xu, who gathered a group of young people and formed a team of itinerant evangelists, followed him. This is group that later developed into one of the largest mission group of over 8,500 full time itinerant evangelists during the last twenty years. Peter Xu was imprisoned again in 1997 and now he is still in the labor camp.

On March 31, 1982 China issued a very important document on religious policy called "Document 19 of CCP Central." While the new policy guarantees freedom of religious belief, it also confines Christian activities to the officially registered TSPM churches and declares non-registered house churches as illegal. The new policy can be summarized by the "three-designated." Which means only designated places are free for Christian gathering, only designated pastoral personnel may preach, and even they must work within their

district only.

The Tiannanmen Square massacre of June fourth, 1989, marked the death of Marxism in the hearts of the Chinese people; particularly the students and young intellectuals became utterly disillusioned with the ideology of Marxism, Leninism, and the Thought of Mao Zedong. Christian faith fearing what happened to Eastern Europe might take place in China. Chinese government began to put more pressure on the church.

Although the Chinese government's requirement for house churches to register with the government and to come under the TSPM has been in place since 1982, a more systematic campaign to bring them under control was launched from early 1994. On January 31, 1994 the State Council issued two decrees, No.144 and No.145. The first one is to control foreigners religious activities in China. The second one is an ordinance requiring all places of religious activities be registered with the Religious Affairs Bureau and be placed under the management of the TSPM.

Many of the larger house meetings were forced to be closed. One church in Wenzhou was blasted to the ground. Several well-known house church leaders have been arrested and mercilessly sentenced to long years of imprisonment.

Yet, very few of the house churches registered with the Religious Affairs Bureau.

Why House churches do not register and Refuse to Join to TSPM

First of all, the alienation between the house churches and the TSPM has been deeply rooted in the history of the church in China since 1950. Christians in the 1950s witnessed how the government used the TSPM to destroy both the institutional churches established by Western missions and indigenous churches founded by Chinese believers. Even today in many cases TSPM pastors work as informants of house church activities to the government resulting in the latter's arrest and imprisonment. Thus to the house churches, the TSPM is an agent of the government. House Church leaders do not regard the TSPM and the China Christian Council (CCC) as authentic representatives of the Chinese church. Hence it is hard for them to be reconciled with their betrayers who are still betraying them.

Secondly, once a house church registers with the government and joins the TSPM, its

activities are limited to Sunday worship. Even mid-week prayer meetings and fellowship groups in the believers homes are forbidden.

Thirdly, once a house church registers and joins the TSPM, it can no longer engage in evangelism outside the church building or designated places of worship.

Finally, the most important reason why house churches refuse to register and join the TSPM is their belief in the Lordship of Christ over the Church. "Who is the head of the church: Christ, or the state?" they would ask. The TSPM accepts the state as the supreme authority of church affairs. Among the prohibitions issues by the state and repeated in "patriotic covenants" issues by the TSPM are: (1) support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and uphold the ideology of Marxism, Leninism, and the Thought of Mao Zedong; (2) faithfully implement the religious policy of the state by observing the above three designates; (3) refrain from evangelizing or baptizing those under 18; (4) when production and religious life conflicts give priority to production; (5) refrain from making contacts with overseas church groups, and (6) refrain from listening to Gospel radio broadcast from abroad, or receive Christian literature or tapes from abroad, etc. House churches are committed to obedience to Christ,

Conclusion

In China there is "certain forms of freedom of religious beliefs" and freedom of worship in the state approved churches. Those who worship and serve there accept the limitations imposed upon them by the state and try to serve God within the sphere of such limitations in exchange for legal standing and freedom from persecution

House churches, which are committed to the headship of Christ in the church and to evangelism must operate as illegal groups conducting "illegal religious activities," and consequently must suffer the administrative penalties inflicted by the state. State persecution and Christian suffering take place within this context of "illegality". Ladies and gentlemen, I want to call your attention on the following facts:

In the past few years, CCP has sent many of their officials from TSPM, CCC, RAB and united Front Work Department to do propaganda in the US in defending their repressive policy to house church leaders and believers. One of the excuses they often use for the arrest of the house church leader is said that because they are "evil criminal cults." Despite the invalidity for an atheist communist government to define who is the orthodox or cult, actually

throughout the house church movement they always label any religious activities out of the CPC's control as "evil criminal cults". Following the severe suppression upon Falun Gong last year, the persecution to the house church leaders and believers had been escalated severely. CCP has been doing a nationwide crackdown campaign toward those unregistered house churches. Churches and believers houses were destroyed. More house church leaders got arrested and being tortured mercilessly.

Let me give you some cases, which happened recently.

(1) In January of this year, according to trustworthy source, a pastor's son of the LISU minority was beaten to death just because they had a Christian gathering in their group. The cattle and oxen of their fellow Lisu believers were confiscated which left them without any means of making a living.

(2) On Nov 23,1999, two house church leaders in Tian Jin City, Mr. Wang, Liqong, 31 and Mr. Yang, Jinfu, 37 got arrested during a church service by the Chinese PSB. Both of them are well-respected preachers by the local believers for their faithful teaching of the Bible. They were charged as so-called "involving illegal cultic activities" and received 1.5 and 1-year re-education through labor respectively. They are now serving as the forced labors in Tian Jin City's Qin Bo Wa Labor Camp.

(3) On July 15, 1999, the PSB raided a Christian gathering Lao Zhuang village, Geng ji town, Zao Yang City, Hu bei province. Fifteen Christians were detained at that night Ms.Liu Ming yi was released after seven-day detention. Mr.Chen Quanyou is still in jail. At the same city, on March to April, 1998, Mr. Zhang Shangkui aged 43 and Mr. Sun Qingshu were arrested and sentenced to two-year reeducation through labor. They are sill in jail today.

(4) On July 23, 1999. The PSB raided a normal Christian gathering in Jun Chen village, Guan Zhuang town, Qi county, Kai Feng city, Henan province They detained twenty-six people from ten to fifteen days. After being tortured by slapping their faces, shocked by the 2000-Watts anti-criminal electric sticks, they were released. They had to pay Y 1,000 (US \$1200) respectively. And their own properties were confiscated by being accused as tools of communication for "evil cults".

(5) On Oct 19, 1999 the same day when president Clinton met with the Commission member on International Religious Freedom, 200 PSB police arrived at the house church of well-known pastor Li Dexian in Guang Zhou, Guangdong province. Pastor Li and his wife and three others were arrested until now and their church was completely demolished. Actually according to a confidential document issued on June 12, 1998 by the Hua Du city, CCP central committee shows that the PSB already had decided to sentence Pastor Li to re-education through labor back then. Pastor Li is still detained.

Though Chinese communist government persecutes them cruelly, Christians of the house church movement do not hate them, nor have any attempt to subvert it, rather they are praying ceaselessly for a prosperous future and for the rulers of China.

Last Nov., five major house church groups who represents 20-30 million Protestant Christians issued their Common Confession of Faith showing to the Government as well as to the world that they are not evil cults, but good citizens. They believe that one more Christian, one less criminal; one more church, one less prison in China. They also issued an appeal to seek dialogue with Chinese government and TSPM. But the government's reply is arrest, beating, electric sticks and heavy fines.. Now three of the signers were sentenced from one to three years re-education through labor..

Finally, I call to the United Nations to have a full investigation on the abuses and persecutions to the religious minorities directed by Chinese government. Let the justice prevail. Let the real criminals be punished.

I call to the American business community, while you are gaining millions of dollars from Chinese cheap labors and their pockets. Please remember they are not only needing Microsoft and McDonalds, but also more importantly, they want to labor as real human being with dignity and integrity and freedom of belief and expression that God has given them. Don't sell your conscience with your contracts!

I call to the American government, legislators and judicial branches, while you are seeking to build a strategic partnership with Chinese Communist government, please remember thousands of innocent people are suffering in China's prisons, labor camps and detention centers just because they share the same value as your forefathers did. Don't forget your national foundation "In God we trust"; when you are lobbied by the dollar bill.

I call to the American parents. While your boys and girls are enjoying your cheap precious toys from China, please remember your spiritual brothers and sisters with their beaten hands and broken legs made many of those toys. Don't forget their boys and girls are crying by missing their imprisoned parents without a toy;

I call to American religious community, while you are worshiping God freely most of the time, please remember hundreds of your fellow co-workers have been being chained for the sake of freedom of worship for fifty years.

God bless China! God bless America!